



Town of Groton, Connecticut

45 Fort Hill Road
Groton, CT 06340-4394
Town Clerk (860)441-6640
Town Manager
(860)441-6630

Meeting Minutes - **Draft**

Town Council Committee of the Whole

Mayor Harry A. Watson, Councilors Peter J. Bartinik, Jr., Natalie Burfoot Billing, Heather Sherman Bond, Catherine Kolnaski, Frank O'Beirne, Jr., Paulann H. Sheets, Thomas J. Skrmetti, and Elissa T. Wright.

Tuesday, May 10, 2005

7:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

REGULAR MEETING

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Watson called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Mayor Watson, Councilor Bartinik, Jr., Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Sheets and Councilor Wright
Members Absent: Councilor Billing, Councilor Bond and Councilor Skrmetti

Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger, Assistant to the Town Manager Lee Vincent and Executive Assistant Nicki Bresnyan.

3. Calendar and Communications

Councilor O'Beirne asked for a referral to the Committee of the Whole regarding privatization of Navy housing. He has heard that four units have been rented to civilian families. Since impact aid will not be paid for civilian school children and the Town will not be collecting taxes, Councilor O'Beirne would like a review of the group's rental policy and an analysis of the impact on aid to the Town.

Councilor Sheets received a call from Mary Archer regarding dumpsters that are being filled at William Seely School, and Ms. Archer wondered if the work is related to the recent damage at Eastern Point School. The Town Manager explained that the Board of Education is doing "house cleaning" at William Seely, but he will check into the issue further and contact Ms. Archer.

4. Approval of Minutes

None.

5. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

6. NEW BUSINESS

2005-0142

Appointment of Town Auditor

Recommended for a Resolution

Director of Finance Sal Pandolfo described the makeup of the auditor selection committee. The committee recommended selection of the firm Blum Shapiro and Company based on interviews and reference checks. Mr. Pandolfo noted they are one of the top three audit firms in Connecticut.

A motion was made by Councilor Wright, seconded by Councilor Kolnaski, to recommend a resolution appointing Blum Shapiro and Company as Town Auditor for a three-year period, with a two-year extension option.

The motion carried unanimously.

2005-0049

Sewer Bond Issue Request

Discussed

The Town Manager noted these items are for informational purposes only. Councilors received a memorandum from Carl Almquist outlining options to pay for the sewer bond. The introduction of the ordinance and setting of public hearing will be on the May 24th Committee of the Whole agenda.

Councilor Wright expressed concern with the method of financing. She reviewed specific language that she would recommend be included in the ordinance that would benefit assess the affected property owners. Councilor Wright feels the opinion from the Town Attorney finds that it would be appropriate to benefit assess for this project. Town Manager Oefinger stated that he interprets the Town Attorney's memo differently. The test for benefit assessment is if there is a benefit. The Assessor has indicated that there would be no tax benefit as a result of the sewer system rehabilitation. The Town Manager indicated he would ask the Town Attorney to attend the next meeting. Town Manager Oefinger went on to explain that other areas of the system will require rehabilitation in the future and how to pay for that is a policy decision for the Council. Councilor Sheets expressed concern with using operating revenues to pay for capital expenditures. She noted that the Fort Hill Homes neighborhood is a mix of owner-occupied and rental units that are owned primarily by two property owners. The upgraded sewer system will allow expanded units and there will be no reflection of that increased value if the properties are not benefit assessed. Town Manager Oefinger stated he would also ask the Assessor to attend on May 24th. He explained that user fees have historically funded rehabilitation projects. All sewer users' fees would increase, not just those in Fort Hill. Councilor Wright suggested including language in the ordinance authorizing the collection of ad valorem tax and benefit assessments in case the Assessor finds there is an added value to a property as a result of the project. Councilor O'Beirne stated that reconstruction or repair is different than providing entirely new service. He is not opposed to the ordinance suggesting that benefit assessment might happen, but he does not believe that should be the policy. He noted that the Town does not benefit assess when a road is repaired. Repair is a continuation of the service and would not warrant benefit assessment.

2005-0151 Introduction of Ordinance for Fort Hill Homes Sewer Rehabilitation Project

Discussed

See discussion under referral 2005-0049.

2003-0016 BRAC-2005/Update

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger distributed information from the Department of Defense regarding the rollout schedule for Friday, May 13th when the base closure list is scheduled to be released.

2004-0142 Copp Property Dog Park

Recommended for a Resolution

Town Manager Oefinger is looking for authorization to proceed with construction of the dog park. He provided a brief history of the referral and project. The Town Manager and Town staff met with representatives from Groton Utilities to discuss this project. The Town Manager distributed an e-mail from Al Dion concerning the meeting where discussion focused on modifying the fence line of the dog park area after field marking, securing the port-o-let that will be located inside a fenced enclosure, and installing signage noting that the park is within a watershed area. Mr. Dion's memo also raises the issue of fencing the boundary of the Copp property and the reservoir, but that is a separate issue from the dog park. Fencing is a future effort that the Manager is committed to working with Groton Utilities on to understand their concerns. Another modification made to the plan was relocation of the northern boundary of the dog park to discourage use of an existing trail. Councilor Sheets expressed support for Groton Utilities' desire to fence the reservoir.

A motion was made by Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., seconded by Councilor Kolnaski, to recommend a resolution authorizing construction of the Copp Property Dog Park with the modifications discussed with Groton Utilities.

Councilor Bartnik questioned the need for the park. Town Manager Oefinger explained that it will be a dedicated area for dog owners to let their dogs run free. If the activity is directed to a specific area, it will be easier to maintain and will benefit people who do not own dogs and are not comfortable with dogs running loose. Mr. Silsby noted there is no leash law, only a requirement that a dog be under control. This park provides a positive alternative to allowing dogs to run free, and provides an opportunity to exercise and socialize a dog within a confined area. Councilor Wright questioned maintenance of the park and Mr. Silsby noted that a dog park association will contribute money to the Town for park upkeep. Councilor Wright also questioned the Town's liability and the Town Manager indicated he would check with Joyce Sauchuk on the issue. The Town will be responsible for mowing and removing waste from receptacles.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Votes: In Favor: 5 - Mayor Watson, Councilor Bartnik, Jr., Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr. and Councilor Wright

Opposed: 1 - Councilor Sheets

Discussed

The Town Manager updated the Committee on the request for additional state bond money for construction of trails at the Copp Property. Funding would go through the Groton Parks Foundation and then be turned over to the Town. With respect to the Memorandum of Understanding, the Copp Board had some concerns with the document, which is why it was never signed. The Town Manager recently met with the Board to address some misunderstandings and appealed to them to reconsider the Memorandum of Understanding.

Councilor O'Beirne also attended the Copp Board meeting. He requested a copy of a plan for the trails that would be constructed with the state funding. The Town Manager noted that the Master Plan is available, but it shows all trails.

The Town Manager recommended a follow up joint meeting with the Copp Board.

2005-0019

Status of Mystic Educational Center

Discussed

The Town Manager met with the Town's legislative delegation and discussed the condition of the Mystic Educational Center. The State Department of Public Works has developed a cost estimate to repair the gymnasium floor, and they are moving forward with a bond issue.

2005-0128

William Seely Mini Community Center

Recommended for Deletion

During budget deliberations, the Council questioned future plans for William Seely. John Silsby, Director of Parks and Recreation, noted it is a challenge to find enough indoor space for recreational programs. He provided an overview of the spaces currently being used and the programs that will be moved from Freeman Hathaway to William Seely. Required modifications to William Seely include asbestos abatement, carpet removal, cleaning and repairs.

2005-0046

Burrows/Copp Property - Potential Acquisition

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger recommended that this item be discussed in executive session because it concerns property negotiations.

A motion was made by Councilor Sheets, seconded by Councilor Bartnik, Jr., to enter executive session at 8:25 p.m. to discuss 2005-0046 Burrows/Copp Property - Potential Acquisition, and to invite Town Manager Mark Oefinger and Assistant to the Town Manager Lee Vincent to attend.

The motion carried unanimously.

Discussed

The executive session concluded at 9:05 p.m. Councilor Bartinik left the meeting at 9:05 p.m.

Roll Call: Members Present: Mayor Watson, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Sheets and Councilor Wright

Members Absent: Councilor Bartinik, Jr., Councilor Billing, Councilor Bond and Councilor Skrmetti

A motion was made by Councilor Sheets, seconded by Councilor Wright, to authorize the Town Manager to apply with the Trust for Public Land for the state grant for acquisition of the Burrows/Copp property.

The motion carried unanimously.

2003-0052 Implementation of recommendations of Plan of Development

Discussed

The Planning and Conservation Commissions are working together to update the conservation theme in the POCD. They have developed a list of 20 sites that have been identified as properties that deserve some type of protection. Councilor Sheets and Councilor O'Beirne discussed methods for prioritizing the list. A public information meeting will be held in the next two to three months.

Councilor Wright suggested that the Council review the checklist of priorities in the POCD relative to the conservation theme to see what action the Council can take to aid in the completion of those items. The Committee asked that this item be placed on an upcoming agenda.

2005-0044 Restrictions in the Deeds of Town-Owned Properties

Not Discussed

Discussion of this item was tabled to a future Committee of the Whole meeting.

2004-0328 Bus Ordinance - Update

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger met with the Mears, owners of Abbotts, in December and expected them to come to a meeting to address the Council, but they have not. The Town's intent is to enforce the ordinance. The Town is relying on the Mears and others to make bus companies aware of the ordinance.

7. Consideration of Committee Referral Items as per Town Council Referral List

Mayor Watson noted he made a referral on Project Labor Agreements.

Councilor Sheets requested a referral to the Environment Committee on the proposed easements from Downes-Patterson Corporation to the Town of Groton for Great Brook Subdivision. Discussion followed on the Council's role in the issue.

8. OTHER BUSINESS

Mayor Watson congratulated Councilor Kolnaski for having the new school on the King Property named after her.

9. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Councilor Kolnaski, seconded by Councilor Sheets, to adjourn at 9:30 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.